

Paul Robbrecht, mentioned above, and Philip Van Den Bossche, curator of Beaufort 2012, reflect on how images, installations and monumental works are given a place in public space, both in parks and along the Belgian coast. How these images are positioned and exhibited is also a history of how exhibitions are organized. It leaves a clear trail.

At the end of the day the people behind the five events want to leave such a trail behind, works of art as beacons, witnesses, monuments and inspirational resting places. After four editions of *Beaufort* a vast and lasting sculpture park is gradually being established; following city exhibitions such as *Chambres d'Amis*, *Over the Edges* and now *Track*, the artistic intervention and the works of art themselves are forming "memory trails" in the image of the city. *Track*, as is stated in the exhibition manifesto, agitates, plays, reads, listens, looks, sees and provides an experience of art that is without boundaries.

PAUL DEPONDT

Translated by Sheila M. Dale

www.visualartsflanders2012.be

The Story of De Stijl.

From Mondrian to Van Doesburg

Two artists and an artistic movement belong to the canon of Dutch history: Rembrandt, Van Gogh and De Stijl. In order to raise the profile of De Stijl as a journal, an artistic movement and an idea in modern Dutch museums, the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag has decided to dedicate a wing of the museum to Mondrian and De Stijl in an exhibition lasting until 1 January 2014. The image that the museum is seeking to create of this group with the exhibition and the accompanying publication is one that is lively, joyful and free: "Although art historians, particularly in the 20th century, have described De Stijl above all as a coolly rational, structured, almost cold style, the intention of the De Stijl artists themselves was to make a work of art that was both dynamic and at the same time lively, free and joyful, just like the future itself. It is no coincidence that they were also involved with dance halls, advertising and fashion." The exhibition includes models, plans, paintings, sculptures, furniture, printed work, typography and fashion and presents them as an eclectic mix, with no hierarchy. The multitude of objects is not brought together to form a clear overall picture, but demands attention for the progressive, multidisciplinary character. Another aim of the exhibition is to reinforce a dynamic image of De Stijl. Starting from Mondrian's 1927 article on neo-plasticism 'in the home, on the streets and in the city' ('Neo-plasticisme: De Woning – De Straat – De Stad'), the exhibition builds on the theme of home/street/city: the presentation is staged "from the inside to the outside, from the small to the large". For the staging of the works, this implies among other things the inclusion of models of Mondrian's studio (which show an evolution from a traditional layout in 1909 to the experimental studio in New York in 1943). The artist Krijn de Koning and the architect Anne Holtrop have created an installation specially for the exhibition (*163 spaces for a work / 163 ruimten voor een werk*), inspired by

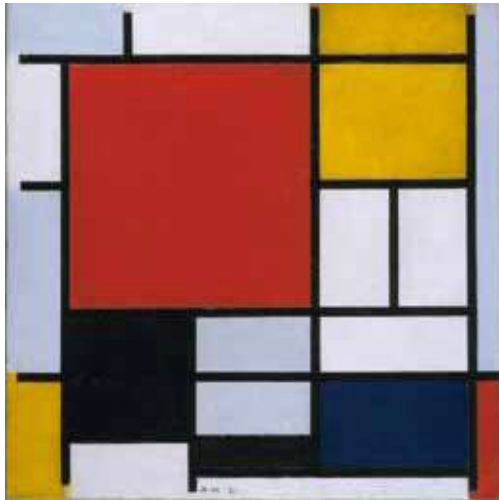


Exhibition view of *Mondrian & De Stijl* © Gerrit Schreurs.

Mondrian's 1927 article. Their design simultaneously forms the architecture of the exhibition space and is elaborately presented as a series of intimate domestic rooms which lead the visitor via a street-like route to another series of more open work rooms. The parallel is clear, if perhaps a little too literal, and has the effect of enclosing the exhibition within several relatively small rooms. Even the biggest rooms are themselves subdivisions of a museum wing which would only be able to convey a true impression of an urban space if it were presented as the open space that it really is.

By contrast, the publication accompanying the exhibition succeeds in its aim of projecting a lively image. After opening the cover which, with its detail of Mondrian's 1921 *Lozenge Composition with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red, and Gray* deliberately plays on the familiarity of rectangular relationships and primary colours, the reader is surprised by two photos which set the tone for the rest of the publication: 'Cheerful group near the shop selling artists' requisites in the alleyway behind Café du Dôme, after closing time. Mondrian second from the right, photographed in August 1926' and 'The germ of the Dada movement is released from a rubbish bin at the Conference of Constructivists and Dadaists in Wei-

mar in September 1922. In the centre are Nelly van Doesburg, Cornelis van Eesteren (with stick) and Theo van Doesburg'. Yet this does not imply a naive idea of a jolly and cohesive group: from the start, the book does not shy away from the confrontations and the frictions which were partly responsible for the innovative power that characterised De Stijl. The book characterises De Stijl as a lively discussion between artists, architects and designers, and begins with the request by the collector Helene Kröller-Müller in 1916 to Bart van der Leek to suggest a colour design for the furnished 'art room' ('Kunstkamer') designed by the architect H.P. Berlage on her Groot Haesebroeck estate in Wassenaar. The collaboration failed because of differing views, but the conflict did result a year later in a manifesto published by Van der Leek in the first issue of the journal *De Stijl*. The publication is a concatenation of these kinds of events: the text is made up of fragmented storylines strung together on a series of meetings between 1916 and 1939, the latter being the year of the Dutch contribution to the World Exhibition in New York. In this article, *De Stijl* is described as a high point of Dutch art in the modern period and as an element of the reforming tradition of community art which has meaning for the future. At the same



Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Large Red Plane, Yellow, Black, Grey and Blue*, 1921, oil on canvas, 59,5 x 59,5 cm. Collection Gemeentemuseum Den Haag © 2007 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust c/o HCR International, Warrenton (VA, USA).

time, the publication almost playfully contradicts the expectation of 'The story of De Stijl' which is evoked by the title, with its fragmentary structure reinforcing the affinity with Dadaism. The book enjoys this ambiguity and takes time to explore how Van Doesburg and Kurt Schwitters felt about the relationship between Dadaism and Neo-plasticism.

While the book and its fragmentary narrative come to an end in 1939, the exhibition also highlights the influence of De Stijl on later artists, architects and designers. The final rooms contain work by Wim Sinemus, Constant, Donald Judd, Imi Knoebel and Piet Hein Eek. This is a limited selection which could have been very different, and precisely because of that it is a selection which, like the book, holds out the promise of more.

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Translated by Julian Ross

- *Mondrian & De Stijl*, until January 1st, 2014, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, www.gemeentemuseum.nl.
- HANS JANSSEN, MICHAEL WHITE, *The Story of De Stijl. Mondrian to Van Doesburg*, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag & Ludion, Antwerp, 2011, 267 p.

Closed yet Close By

The Royal Museum for Fine Arts in Antwerp

A number of large museums in the Low Countries are in scaffolding at present. In Amsterdam work has been going on for years on the *Rijksmuseum* and the *Stedelijk Museum*. Now the Royal Museum for Fine Arts in Antwerp has also closed its doors for extensive alterations. The three museums are housed in buildings that date from the end of the nineteenth century and urgently need to be modernised to the standards appropriate for a museum of the twenty-first century.

The renovation of the Museum for Fine Arts in Antwerp will take at least six years, and it is hoped that it will be able to reopen in 2017. That it will take so long is due, of course, to the far-reaching nature of the work needed, but also to the fact that the majority of the works of art will remain in storage in the museum, so that people will have to take care how they go about things.

However some six hundred works of art are being transferred to other locations. The museum management has devised a programme: "Closed yet close by", with which they wish to indicate that although the museum is closed at present, the collection is still accessible. The works of art are going to other locations where they will supplement other collections or where they will form part of temporary exhibitions.

A first batch of paintings left the museum as early as the end of 2009 to return to the place they were originally made for: Antwerp Cathedral. A great many altarpieces were taken from the cathedral during the period of the French Revolution and placed in various museums. Eight of these altarpieces, including work by Quinten Metsijs and Peter Paul Rubens, which currently form part of the collection of the Museum for Fine Arts, now hang again in the place where they hung until the end of the eighteenth century. The original intention was that the exhibition would be dismantled at the end of 2009, but because the museum was being closed anyway the canvasses will continue to hang there until 2017.